

MINUTES
Page 1 of 8
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2005
REGULAR SESSION
SELECTMEN'S MEETING ROOM, TOWN HALL
7:00 PM

Call to Order

A regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order at 7:02 PM in the Selectmen's Meeting Room of Town Hall. All members were present. Town Administrator Tom Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti were also present.

Questions from Town Residents

There were no questions.

Other

There was discussion of the proposed traffic roundabout on Bright Road. The money has already been budgeted and it is expected to go to bid in April.

The Board moved: to approve the design for the roundabout.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

Action by Appointment

Discussion of Prospect Street / Verizon

Verizon Representatives Carol Baribeau and Donna Johnson, Community Development Director Glenn Clancy and Public Works Director Peter Castanino appeared before the Selectmen.

Mr. Clancy reviewed questions that have cropped up over the last couple of years about Verizon's presence on Prospect Street and whether the conduit that exists there is capable of supporting fiber optic cable. There have also been a series of problems with reliability of service on Prospect Street. Different Verizon representatives have given different answers in the past which need to be clarified. The Town has been told that the wires are old and that is a major factor.

Ms. Baribeau stated that Verizon would like to research these individual issues, and that the company's records don't show the level of reliability issues that the Town is talking about.

Resident Joan Campbell stated that her phone and internet have been out for five days and related her dealings with Verizon personnel. She called on Thanksgiving to report this and the problem still had not been fixed when she left to come to this meeting. She feels this is unacceptable. This is the second time this year that she has been without service.

Ms. Baribeau agreed and promised to look into it.

Mr. Clancy pointed out that this problem extends to some of the side streets off Prospect as well.

Resident Dix Campbell agreed and noted that residents on Kenmore Road and Garfield Road have had problems. He stated that the service has been very poor and read a letter from a Verizon technician to him. He added that he hopes this gets addressed before someone has a real calamity.

The Board inquired how Verizon defines an acceptable level of service.

Ms. Baribeau responded that Verizon wants to have a continuous dial tone, but it sounds like that is not the case here so Verizon does not in fact have an acceptable level of service. She apologized for the service problems.

The Board asked to meet with the Verizon representatives again in 30 days after Verizon has had a chance to look into all these issues and provide the Board with its answer to the situation. Chairman Solomon added that it is unfortunate that the Selectmen had to have a meeting of the Board for Verizon to become aware that there is a serious problem in one of neighborhoods. The Board hopes Verizon will remedy that and that we will not have to do this again after our next meeting.

Ms. Baribeau promised that Verizon will come before the Board of Selectmen again with information and a plan on how to fix the problem and a date when it will be completed.

The Board inquired as to the age of the utility pipe on Prospect Street. Ms. Johnson answered that the pipe in this location is PVC and was replaced within the last couple of years. Mr. Clancy asked if the pipe is sufficient to carry fiber optic cable and Ms. Johnson answered that it is.

The Board thanked Verizon for coming to the meeting. The Verizon representatives left the meeting to talk further with the residents that were present.

Discussion of Pleasant Street Construction

Mr. Clancy gave an update on the status of the Pleasant Street reconstruction project. The contractor most recently put in a 1 inch overlay where the utility work has been done between Trapelo and Snake Hill Roads to help get the road through the winter. This was at no extra cost to the Town. This is not a permanent road surface.

There remains plenty of utility work to be done. Roads Corporation (contractor) has finished the section between Trapelo Road and Snake Hill. It is the intention of Roads and MassHighway to continue that work (electric conduit, storm drains) between Snake Hill Road and Concord Avenue. They would like permission to continue this work across Concord Avenue as far as Leonard Street if conditions permit. Then when the weather breaks in the spring they can turn to the sidewalks and roadwork.

The Board inquired if there would be any drawback to allowing this.

Mr. Castanino answered that the weather conditions could create safety issues as the Town will still be doing the plowing on Pleasant Street. He stated that he is comfortable with what Roads has committed to do from a safety standpoint.

The Board moved: to grant the approval to continue the work during winter.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

The Board of Selectmen asked if overall Roads Corporation is on target for completion of the project.

Mr. Clancy explained that when the project began, November 2006 was the initial target date. He does not believe they can meet that date now because of some of the things that were uncovered during the course of the work. Mr. Clancy thinks that it will carry into the spring of 2007 and is hoping it will be completed by June 30, 2007.

Resident Arthur Wolfson of Pleasant Street asked if the area from Snake Hill Road to Concord Avenue can be monitored to ensure that the work will get done before they proceed on toward Leonard Street.

The Selectmen agreed that the idea is to do it in sections and finish each section before beginning the next. Mr. Clancy explained that the storm drains have to be installed in the sections as they are laid out or it can't work properly. Roads Corporation wants to know that the drainage system works while they are doing road construction.

Discussion of Road Program Management

Mr. Clancy gave a presentation on the Pavement Management Program. In 1997 the Town identified \$1.2 million as an appropriate annual level for road reconstruction, and \$1 million went to the road surfaces themselves. Today, the Town still spend \$1.2 but only half a million goes to the road surface.

In 1997, the only other costs were engineering costs and police details. Now, sidewalk and curbing are also being funded, which increases the engineering costs. Also, police detail costs are higher now because the Town is focusing on the major roads which are more heavily trafficked. The result of all this is fewer miles of roadway are being repaired per year.

Mr. Clancy showed how the estimated cost per square yard has gone up from \$28/sy in 2002 to \$83/sy in 2006 and the estimated time to completion of major roads has increased from 15 to 26 years at the same level of funding. He explained this is increased materials cost plus new components such as traffic calming measures (bumpouts and raised intersections.) He stated that if the Town wants to stick to the 13-15 year time frame for acceptable service on “major roads” we are looking at a funding level of \$2 million annually the way the Town does it today.

There was discussion of how much of an impact the policy of focusing on major roads has town-wide because these roads are used heavily by people who live all over town.

The Board noted that the problem isn't the main road surface but the patches, and if a better job could be done patching, the Town would make a huge gain.

Mr. Castanino responded that this is a problem everywhere, but the Town can do a better job and his department is re-evaluating the street opening permit process.

There was discussion of Bright Road as an example of a road that is slated for construction. The Board discussed whether it is necessary to do new sidewalks here since the current sidewalks are in fairly good shape. Mr. Clancy agreed there are areas where we could retain the concrete sidewalk, but are the residents expecting brand new sidewalks because that is what we have done elsewhere? He indicated that he is open to reviewing how we do our sidewalks.

The Board agreed that we should have a conversation about sidewalks. The Board asked about the possibility of concrete curbs instead of granite. Mr. Castanino and Mr. Clancy explained that salt and plowing really breaks them down.

Mr. Castanino noted that when we were only doing roadways we got a lot of comments that we were ignoring pedestrians by not doing the sidewalks. However, we shouldn't be replacing all the existing sidewalks. We can do more sidewalk patching but people have to understand that it is always going to look patched.

Selectman Brownsberger added that a number of the sidewalks we have done have dramatically improved walkability because there were no sidewalks there and we

have made a commitment to do that. But if we already have walkability someplace like Bright Road, he is all for leaving it.

Mr. Castanino stated that the Town has to decide whether to do sidewalks as a separate program or not. He believes it makes sense to do the sidewalks and roadways together.

Returning to Mr. Clancy's presentation, he explained that the \$2 million is just for construction. It really needs to be \$2.4 million to cover engineering and police details. Mr. Clancy's annual budget request for the pavement program will be \$3 million because we also have to do maintenance.

The Board asked if we have the manpower to do this if the funding is approved. Mr. Clancy said yes, once we fill the resident engineer position which we are working on now and we should have that done by April when we'd be ready to break ground.

He added that we typically look at 72 as a good grade for a road. In order to get that on every road in town the way we have been doing it, we'd have to spend \$5 million a year for 20 years.

Mr. Clancy said that he would like to post on the Internet what streets we are talking about – collector roads and arterials – as major roads, so people can see. These are based on traffic counts and just looking at the map. The Board asked if these are prioritized. Mr. Clancy answered that he has a grading system but he does not adhere to it strictly so that he can fit the dollars together to maximize what gets done each year.

There was discussion of an e-mail from a resident of Alma Avenue about the condition of the road. Mr. Clancy noted that Alma Avenue is a neighborhood road and not a major road, so we are not looking to fund reconstruction there any time in the next 15 years. The Board felt that this is an example of why communication is important and that we need to be honest about our level of expectations.

Mr. Clancy stated that he looked at segmenting the program to direct, say, 10% of the funding to neighborhood roads and 10% to maintenance. But in order to be effective he found we'd have to increase those percentages.

Mr. Castanino stated that we could make the roads better in the short term by doing overlays. But it's not a long term solution and it takes away funds from the full reconstructions and crack sealing.

There was discussion of patches done by utility companies. Mr. Clancy and Mr. Castanino noted that Keyspan can't use the best fill material that we have because it would not allow the odor of gas to come up as a warning if there is a leak.

The Board discussed having a “roads trust fund” with a dedicated revenue stream from a tax increase in which the money could be carried over from year to year but could not be spent on anything other than the roads program.

Mr. Clancy pointed out that he needs to know now what roads he will be constructing in July of 2006. But we will probably still be finalizing the budget in June. He does not have the luxury of waiting until then. He has to go ahead with the planning and hope that we have the money settled. This is why it is important to have the amount of money known ahead of time for every year.

The Board agreed that the idea of a “roads trust fund” should be revisited and discussed with the Warrant Committee and the Capital Budget Committee.

Mr. Clancy stated that he would love to have a clear policy on sidewalk construction, and it was agreed that he will formulate and recommend such a policy to the Board. It was also agreed that he will put his roads priority list on the Town’s web site. The Board agreed to discuss the trust fund idea in late January after the operating budget proposals for FY07 have been made, and to have a preliminary discussion first with the chairs and vice chairs of the Warrant Committee and the Capital Budget Committee.

The Board asked Mr. Clancy and Mr. Castanino to quantify how much could be saved over two years by making some reasonable changes in how we handle sidewalks and curbing.

Mr. Castanino then spoke briefly to request a reserve fund transfer of \$24,000 to fund a handicapped accessible viewing area at the Viglirolo ice rink and protection and insulation of pipes that run under it. This was not included in the original budget.

The Board moved: to recommend such a transfer to the Warrant Committee.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

There was discussion of another reserve fund transfer request to fund additional hours for Recreation Dept. personnel.

The Board moved: to support the Town Administrator’s decision not to recommend this to the Warrant Committee.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

Discussion of VFW Lease

This discussion was postponed to a later date.

Security Committee

Building Services Manager Kevin Looney appeared before the Board to recommend establishing a Security Committee to make recommendations on a town-wide policy for security in Town buildings. There was discussion of a list of potential members. The Board asked Mr. Younger to put the committee together based on the recommendation, within three months so that Town Meeting can fund it in April.

Town Administrator's Report

Mr. Younger reported that the Town started budget meetings today. He also reported that the Waverley Fire Station closing will be no later than December 9.

Other Items: Chairman Solomon reported briefly on his appearance before the Cambridge City Council regarding the impact on flooding and traffic issues of proposed development in the Alewife Quadrangle.

There was discussion of the goals summary prepared by Mr. Younger. Chairman Solomon suggested Mr. Younger add the security system to the document and for the other Board members to get any changes or recommendations to Mr. Younger as soon as possible. The Board would be updated by the Town Administrator once a month on progress. Chairman Solomon suggested the Board meet quarterly to review where we are at as far as meeting these goals.

There was discussion of how progress in each area will be quantified. The Board agreed that the goals statement and review process is a giant step in the right direction. The Board agreed to meet to review goals progress during an "off-session" in March.

Mr. Conti reported on a proposal to have a holiday luncheon for town employees. He recommended looking into holding it at the Belmont Women's Club as had been done in 2002. He suggested a three-hour duration to allow employees to take turns attending the event and covering their offices. He also suggested pizza as a low-cost food option, and added the possibility of inviting local restaurants to contribute food with the idea that employees might patronize restaurants at lunchtime if they have the opportunity to try their food.

The Board asked if this would include school personnel. Mr. Conti said no, that would be too many people. It was noted that the School Department holds their own holiday event. However, the Board felt it would be appropriate to invite Superintendent Holland and senior school administrative staff. The Board noted that we are uncomfortable with the propriety of asking businesses to contribute.

The Board recommended proceeding with the proposal but dropping the idea of the restaurants contributing.

The Board noted that this Thursday is the Belmont Center Lighting Ceremony (6-8:30 PM).

The Board moved: to enter executive session to discuss litigation and not to return to open session.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

The Board entered executive session at 9:41 PM. No motions were taken before adjournment.

Thomas G. Younger
Town Administrator